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Larry has worked in mental health since 1990. He began work with Mental Health Resources in 1996 and became a partner in 2000 and was named President in 2007. In 2005, Larry formed Willowbrook, Inc. with two partners. Both organizations are contract providers for Tri-County Mental Health services for children and adults in Ray, Platte and Clay Counties in Missouri. Larry currently supervises 12 clinicians and see 10 individuals for counseling.

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"Coaching An Athlete with ADHD" by Larry Lauvetz, M.A.

Coaching an athlete with ADHD is no different than coaching any other athlete, although it is helpful for you to get to know your athlete for when things may come up for which you are not familiar. Having a good one-on-one conversation with your athletes is crucial if you are going to get the best results for them, the team, and yourself. These conversations may include talking about what motivates them, learning how their ADHD affects them and how their medications help, and/or what considerations they require when they are at practice or during a game.

Some coaches feel as though it is not their job to worry about anything other than coaching. These coaches do not typically make as good an impact on these young athletes lives as they could. A good coach can make a positive difference by pulling a player aside and asking about what is going on and learning about what might help to make the situation better. Bad coaches do not have time for this sort of personal interaction as their focus stays locked only on getting wins.

It has been reported that ADHD may be more common in elite athletes than in the general public – up to 8% for these athletes compared to 2%–7% of the general population according to the British Journal of Sports Medicine 53(12), 741-745. Many athletes have come forward even after their careers are over and are diagnosed with ADD or ADHD—including football Hall of Famer, Terry Bradshaw. Other athletes attribute their involvement in sports as a way of dealing with their affliction, including decorated Olympic swimming champion, Michael Phelps who stated that he felt “like I was bouncing off the walls” and noted how being involved with sports was a way for him “to bleed off all this energy.”

Some athletes find sports an engaging way to get focused as opposed to in school where they really struggle because it is not engaging enough. The following is from the perspective of a young lady, Susan, who recently graduated from Ole Miss and dealt with ADHD during her softball days:

“From an early age, playing sports has always been an outlet for me. It has allowed me to express myself and grow a new form of confidence. I first stepped on the softball field when I was four years old. As the years went on, I eventually lived my dream of playing college softball at the Division I and junior college level. However, it wasn't until my sophomore year of college that I encountered the unexpected challenge of ADHD. I noticed my ability to concentrate in the classroom was diminishing, and this struggle gradually led its way into my performance on the field. Instructions would slip from my memory, specific plays became a blur, and overall, I found it difficult to maintain focus during practice and games. Eventually, I received a diagnosis of ADHD and was prescribed medication to address my difficulties.”

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“As a former collegiate athlete, I valued the importance of establishing a deep connection with my coach. It went beyond the realm of athletics—I looked for a bond that would provide me with guidance, support, and a listening ear whenever I faced challenges. With coaches who truly comprehended me as an individual, not just as a player on the field, I was able to exceed my own expectations and achieve excellence in various aspects of my life.”

“In my experience, it is essential for coaches to cultivate an inclusive environment for athletes. Engaging in open and personal conversations with athletes can yield tremendous advantages. However, as an athlete with ADHD, I often encountered a lack of understanding from people, including my coaches. I felt as though I was never taken seriously. I consistently struggled with verbal explanations, and fear hindered me from seeking further clarification on new drills or plays. I frequently confronted common phrases like “Were you not paying attention?” or “Were you not listening?” Sometimes, when I mustered the courage to ask a simple question, the responses from my coaches would embarrass me and make me question my place on the field. I was regularly seen as inattentive or disengaged.

Nonetheless, having a coach who recognizes that certain athletes may require additional attention or clearer explanations instills a sense of acknowledgment and worth in an athlete. I don't seek to be treated differently; I want to have the same opportunity and ability to be able to comprehend and grasp the same concepts as my teammates.

To the coaches who argue that it is not their “responsibility” or “job” to concern themselves with factors beyond the field in their athletes' lives, I want to convey a crucial message: this mindset will hinder your personal and professional growth. Your athletes perceive you as their leader. If you genuinely aspire to fulfill your role as a leader, you must go above and beyond to benefit your team, especially your individual players. Achieving the status of the best team requires each player performing at their peak. While the paths to support each player may vary, your players will always remember the person who invested time and effort to empower them to reach their fullest potential.”

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Additional information on ADHD can be found at the National Resource Center on ADHD (NRC) <https://chadd.org/about/about-nrc/>, through [benefits.gov](https://www.benefits.gov), [nami.org](https://www.nami.org), or your local [Community Behavioral Health Center \(CBHC\)](#)